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THE PERSONAL SIDE OF HERBERT SPENCER.

HERBERT SPENCER, the philosopher, has passed his eightieth year, and now spends his declining days in the peaceful seclusion of his English home, his health broken and his nervous system shattered by the stupendous task which his iron will and prodigious labors have achieved.

Spencer was the son of a liberal, broad-minded man, a teacher; one who did not force the budding mind, but rather let it grow and blossom into its fullness and vigor, assimilating thoroughly the knowledge it acquired. In an atmosphere of home life that was free and wholesome, where individuality was encouraged and liberal thought and ideas were fostered, Spencer passed his boyhood, from books learning little, but from nature much. Men who did not warp the mind to fit some scheme of education, but those who framed their scheme to fit the mind, were happily intrusted with young Spencer's schooling. He early showed no love for Latin verse nor classic fable, and Cambridge was well abandoned. Free from the encumbrances of old world theories and authorities, Spencer's wonderful analytic and exceptionally speculative powers were allowed to mature and become vigorous under natural and favorable conditions.

In 1837 he entered the business world as a civil engineer, for which his mathematical and mechanical turn of mind seemed best to fit him. After eight years of engineering, during which time he had contributed numerous articles to journals devoted to civil engineering and architecture, he was, at the age of twenty-six, owing to the exigencies of his business, forced to turn his energies into other channels of em-

ployment. His growing intellectual taste naturally drew him towards literature as a career, and he became sub-editor of a newspaper, the *Economist*. During the following ten years, in five of which he held this post, he laid the foundation of his later great work by his wide and varied studies. He also won recognition as an astute and vigorous thinker by his first complete work, "Social Statics," and by his numerous essays, the most notable being "The Philosophy of Style," "Manners and Fashions," and "Progress, Its Law and Cause." In 1855 he published his "Principles of Psychology," a profound treatise upon mental phenomena. It was not until 1860 that the famous prospectus of the "Synthetic Philosophy" was first issued, a design which occupied nearly forty years in its execution, and which has exerted more far-reaching influence on modern thought than any philosophic work of the century. This was at forty years of age, a time of life when most men, having reached the meridian of life, are content to reef their sails of activity and pass smoothly along with the current. Though Spencer had received from the world no warrant of its confidence in his powers for such a task, though from experience he had learned to expect no compensation for his labors, and though suffering from an incurable malady of the brain, he planned and ultimately executed a work which has marked an epoch in the field of philosophy, and which in boldness of conception and brilliancy of execution has never been surpassed.

Even before the first chapter of "First Principles" was finished, insomnia forced him to abandon the series for a year and seek change of scene and recreation in Scotland and upon the Continent. The work was then continued, and progressed with many interruptions until 1864, during which time the "First Principles" and the "Principles of Biology" had been issued. It was then that the deplorable fact became known that further publication of the "Synthetic Philosophy" must be abandoned, owing to Spencer's lack of means to carry it on. Spencer had already sacrificed over \$5,000 of his small property in its publication. As soon as the condition of his affairs became known, many of

his friends generously offered to defray the cost of continuing the publication. John Stuart Mill agreed to assume the entire expense, and Sir John Lubbock and Huxley started a subscription of the series in order to help its support. Although Spencer was deeply sensible of the generosity which prompted these kind offers, he peremptorily refused them all. It is therefore gratifying to remember that it was the unremitted efforts of an American that secured Spencer the assistance which made a continuance of the philosophic series possible, and that it was from American scholars that he first received that impartial criticism and unstinted praise which his now world-famed philosophy well deserved, and to which his own country gave but a tardy acquiescence.

The story of E. J. Youmans's life, the founder of the *Popular Science Monthly*, and the man who has done possibly more than any other for the advancement of liberal thought in this country, is the record of a loyal and life-long friendship for a man whom he recognized to be the greatest living thinker of his age. In a very interesting letter which Youmans wrote to his sister, when on his first visit to Spencer in England during the summer of 1862, he said: "When I look upon the man [Spencer], with his health broken and nerves shattered, and remember his is the foremost intellect of our civilization, and that he is the man beyond all men of his age to control the thought of the future; when I think of him, hampered and harassed for want of means to publish his great thoughts, as having to think for the world, and then having to pay the expense of instruction, setting up other men in the intellectual business with a paragraph—I confess I thank God I had a little opportunity to do him service. Dear sister, let us respect ourselves more that we saw through the obscurity of distance the genius and exalted claims of this unheralded man, and were led to help him in a way he most needed help."

As soon as Youmans became aware of the necessity of discontinuing the publication of the "Synthetic Philosophy," he determined to exert every effort to avert it, and with that end in view he immediately started a subscription among

American scholars, and by his indomitable efforts he raised within a short time a fund of \$7,000, which was invested in American securities in Mr. Spencer's name. The fund completed, it remained to use great tact and discretion in order to gain Spencer's consent to its use in defraying the cost of proceeding with the series, as he had already declined all offers of a similar intent. To attain this end Youmans left for England in January, 1865.

It was while smoking their cigars, one beautiful summer's day in Spencer's garden, that Youmans broached the purpose of his visit, and handed the great philosopher a letter from Robert Minturn, of Boston, which apprised him of the munificent gift from his friends in America. The letter was worded with exceptional skill and tact, and expressed the feeling of his friends in America that, as few men in the world's history of our race had had the privilege of rendering such an important service to society as he, they felt that a cessation of the philosophic series would be a loss not only to themselves but to the world. The acceptance of the gift, therefore, they had not permitted themselves to doubt, as it was offered not merely as an expression of respect and gratitude to him personally, but also in the highest interest of liberal thought and civilization. The gift and the manner in which it was made not only afforded Spencer the keenest pleasure, but gained his acceptance of it as a trust fund for the use of public ends. Youmans then presented him with a handsome watch, a gift also from a few of his American friends.

This was one of the many ways in which Youmans indirectly contributed to the advancement of knowledge, and proved again his unflagging devotion to Spencer's interests. In his admirable biography of E. J. Youmans John Fiske says that as long as Youmans lived Spencer had on this side of the ocean an *alter ego* always on the alert, with the vision, like that of a hawk, for the slightest chance to promote his interest and that of his system of thought. The great service which Youmans rendered Spencer may be placed beside the record of Emerson's zealous efforts in heralding in this

country the rugged and matchless genius of Carlyle, and in securing for him some protection from the piracy of unscrupulous publishers, and is among the brightest pages in the history of unselfish friendship among men of letters.

Many interesting stories are told of Youmans's success in overcoming the prejudice against Spencer's philosophy which at that time was felt by some of the most broad and scholarly men of this country. Especially was this true in the case of many of the clergy, who were bitterly opposed to the then so-called Positivist school, of which Comte was the chief exponent, and with which, either through ignorance or ill-will, certain scholars chose to identify Spencer. Youmans was anxious to gain access to the columns of the New York *Tribune*, which at that time had a greater circulation and a wider influence than any other newspaper published in the United States, for comments on Spencer's books. George Ripley, an ex-Unitarian minister and a fine classical scholar, was then the literary editor. Although he acknowledged never to have read any of Spencer's books, he was unequivocally committed against Spencer's supposed Positivist teachings. He had always flatly refused the columns of the *Tribune* for any favorable comment of Spencer's works, and it was only by the influence of Greeley that Youmans had managed, as he expressed it, fairly "to battle in" a short notice of Spencer's "Education." On the other hand, it was Henry Ward Beecher who would say to Youmans: "Subsoil the people with Spencer, Huxley, and Tyndall. If the trellis of the old philosophies are rotten and falling down, away and let us have better. We can trail the vines of faith on the new ones just as well." Beecher, whose opinion Ripley valued highly, lent Ripley, at Youmans's instigation, his well-marked copy of Spencer's "Essays." In this way Youmans succeeded in gaining Ripley's interest, and he finally converted him from a dangerous opponent to a warm advocate of Spencer's views. Thereafter the columns of the *Tribune* were always open to him for any comment of Spencer's books which he might choose to write.

Spencer's philosophy has not been something foreign and exterior to himself, but has been essentially a part of his life, as he has applied it both in principle and in the proper phraseology to the criticism and consideration of all questions which may arise. Always delightfully candid, he speaks his mind forcibly and fearlessly, influenced by no mundane considerations of popularity. Indifferent to worldly honors, and free from the vanity which a title may flatter, Spencer has preferred to retain the simple dignity of the name he has won for himself. He has always shown a generous nature and a patient tolerance often in the face of narrow and petty criticism, and has won, by his broad views, clear understanding, and catholic sympathies, the friendship and esteem of men in many spheres of life. A healthy optimistic confidence in the ultimate dominance of the higher and nobler altruistic forces which are working throughout life is characteristic of the man and his works. How little he sympathizes with the pessimist is shown by what he said of Carlyle. Speaking one day to Youmans of the garrulous Scotchman, he said: "I used to visit Carlyle; but he got so cross and misanthropic, and raved so constantly about the hor-r-ible state of things [imitating the Scotch accent], that I couldn't stand it. I do not want to argue with him, so I stay away. He is a prodigious talker. His tongue rattles incessantly; even his wife cannot get a chance to say a word until he goes out to smoke his pipe, when she starts up and proves that nothing but her husband can extinguish her. Carlyle's conversation is one long damn."

Though in later years, owing to ill health and the exacting demands of his work, Spencer has virtually excluded himself from society, early in the sixties he was often one of the coterie of brilliant literary and scientific men who made London their home. Mary Ann Evans was in those days the sub-editor of the *Westminster Review*, to which Spencer was a regular contributor. She was well known as a clever writer, although she had not then gained her afterwards remarkable renown as a writer of fiction under the name of George Eliot. She and Spencer were warm friends, and

in one of her letters to Mrs. Bray she speaks of the delicious new friendship of Mr. Spencer, adding that but for him her life would be desolate enough. They must have seen a good deal of each other in those *Westminster Review* sub-editorship days, for she says in one of her letters: "Spencer and I have agreed that we are not in love, and that we may see as much of each other's society as we like. We see each other every day, and have a delightful *camaraderie* in everything." It was no other than the rising philosopher who encouraged her to write fiction, and who was the inspiration of her first novel, "Scenes from Clerical Life." He always contended that she was the greatest living woman of her time, if not the greatest female intellect that had ever appeared, and that "Silas Marner" was her greatest book.

George Henry Lewes, he who was dubbed the ugliest man and the best talker in London, was then gaining prominence in the world of letters as a brilliant and clever writer. In his diary, about 1859, he recorded the fact that his acquaintance with Spencer was the brightest ray in a very dreary, wasted period of his life, and that the stimulus of Spencer's intellect, especially during their long walks, roused his energy and once more revived his dormant love of science. This was not the only debt he acknowledged he owed to Spencer; there was one of greater moment in his life. It was Spencer who introduced Lewes to George Eliot, who afterwards became his wife, and to whom he has said he owed all his success and his best inspirations. Spencer remained a warm and lifelong friend of the Leweses, in whose home he always enjoyed the distinction and privilege of an intimate.

George Eliot speaks of Spencer as being always brimful of clever talk. He was an animated talker, thoroughly in touch with the actualities of life, and of kind and sterling qualities which have endeared him to those fortunate enough to know him well; a bright, happy, clear-cut, forcible man withal, enjoying between long intervals of ill-health the society of men and women of mark and intellect. He used to love his game of billiards, at which he was exceptionally skilled, and his was a well-known figure about the billiard tables of the

Athenæum Club. In one of his characteristic letters Youmans, while in London, gives an amusing account of his experience with Spencer at a game of billiards: "I play billiards here with Spencer every night, after dinner. Scratches here are called flukes. Spencer gives me thirty, and I get fifty first about once in three. But I do a stupendous amount of fluking, sometimes to Spencer's great disgust. We started the other night, and I fluked up to fifty before he got one. He stands aghast. I assure him it is my usual way."

In the winter of 1878 Spencer persuaded Youmans to come again to England and accompany him on a trip on the Continent for the restoration of their respective healths. Youmans went, and they traveled together through Southern France. Spencer was a prodigious walker, and he would walk until he was so thoroughly exhausted that as soon as he sat down in a chair he would fall asleep. In this way he would cure himself of insomnia. From what may be gleaned from Youmans's letters written from Hyères, France, during that sojourn, it is very evident that he did not altogether participate with Spencer in the delight of walking. In a letter to his sister, written during that time, he says: "We are 'resting,' giving the animal a chance. Spencer will let me do nothing but walk and eat. Can't read nor write. Have to steal moments to write letters. He is working like ten horses in quest of what he came for—relaxation! So we walked two hours this afternoon on the piazza, which is seventeen feet long and ten feet wide, passing each other at every turn. Lord, how the people stared! But Spencer didn't care, and I am sure I shall never see them again." In another letter he said: "It has stopped raining; now we shall have to start through the mud in quest of the 'rest' we are after. At this point Spencer came in for a walk—a slight ramble for an hour. It was very wet and muddy, but we 'rambled' through the lanes and alleys, up and around the sides of the mountain, climbing for an hour's steady pull. Then he struck off into an obscure path that promised more direct descent; we lost the path and lost our way, and had to plunge down the steep, rocky, muddy sides of a great hill

full of gorges and deep chasms. We got back after two hours' steady pull, and I was quite used up. We had 'breakfast' at twelve o'clock, then another tramp for twenty minutes, at the end of which time I backed out. He has gone on, but will be back to get another pull before dinner.'

It is not the purpose of this article to give any critical summary of Mr. Spencer's writings, nor to gauge the value of his work to the advancement of knowledge. Time alone can give the perspective necessary to an adequate comprehension of the value and importance of his contribution to philosophy.

Mr. Spencer came to his task equipped with an innate love of natural science that was enhanced by a marvelous faculty of observation, and to these he added a knowledge that was as profound as it was encyclopedic. In the English *Quarterly Review*, some years ago, there appeared in an article on Herbert Spencer the following paragraph, in which the writer has perhaps happily summed up Mr. Spencer's remarkable endowments: "Spencer's vigorous and well-exercised powers and natural faculties have enabled him to gather up within his delicate yet nervous grasp not only the multitudinous threads spun by the various discoverers in physical science, but also those yet more subtle fibers which our recent best psychologists have drawn forth, weaving the whole with dexterous skill into an intellectual fabric of great delicacy and apparent cohesion." George Henry Lewes, who ranks high among English philosophers, has contended that no thinker of finer caliber has ever appeared in England.

Mr. Spencer's adaptation and application of the theory of evolution has had a stupendous influence on modern thought. Taking as a basis a hypothesis the opposite of which he shows by irrefutable logic to be unthinkable, he has worked into the whole field of phenomena the theory of evolution, uniting by a wonderful power of generalization subjects as diversified as they are remote. But although his contemporaries have now conceded him the position of the foremost intellect of our civilization, it was hardly to be expected that his philosophy, so comprehensive in scope and to a certain

extent revolutionary in fundamental principle, should not at first meet with bitter opposition and scathing criticism. With infinite travail divine truth was ever born, and the world has seldom proved herself its kind and gentle foster mother.

The clearness and purity of Mr. Spencer's logic, and the force and terseness of his incomparable style, have proved him a formidable controversialist in the arena of philosophic discussion. He has always met with unvarying fairness the attacks of the numerous disciples of the different philosophic schools of thought, many of whom had hitherto concentrated their energies to dispute the tenability of each other's doctrines, but now combined their intellectual forces to discredit a system which bade fair to supersede their own. Earlier in the century, when the battle between religion and science raged fiercest, and before Huxley had introduced the inoffensive and much-needed word "agnostic;" when men who rode under the banner of Science were branded as atheists, materialists, pantheists, positivists, and what not—Spencer's "First Principles" and his "Principles of Psychology" were the battle ground of many a brilliant sally, and many a grand array of ancient authority and respected tradition went down before Truth's mailed knight. Although Huxley may be said to be the father of "agnosticism," it was perhaps Spencer more than any other who has most stoutly defended and most clearly defined the position of that sect. This was acknowledged by Frederic Harrison when he entered the lists in the name of religion, and crossed lances with his redoubtable antagonist in the memorable encounter in the *Nineteenth Century*, which aroused the interest of two continents. He said then that Spencer had given the last word of agnostic philosophy in its long controversy with religion, and it was hard to conceive how religion could rally for another bout from such a *sorites* of dilemmas as was there presented. Notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Harrison was badly worsted in that affray, religion has since then rallied for many another bout. But now that the greatest century of the world has drawn to a close, the bitterness of

erstwhile differences is being forgotten under the broadening influences of a more liberal knowledge and a finer culture, and the two great parties, laying aside their petty strife and jealousies, are looking into the future, each conscious of its own great mission. While science halts helpless upon the brink of the great unknown, the enigma of life unriddled, religion moves slowly onward, inspired and hopeful in her faith to span the gulf and penetrate the infinitude beyond.

Science, in the centuries of the past but a rushlight flickering in the gloom of ignorance, now flashes like a beacon throughout the world, revealing the majestic forces which are potently working toward a realization of a grander and nobler ideal of our race. While Science, with patient toil and unflagging zeal, lays bare the subtle laws and forces that interweave and underlie the inscrutable thing called life, Philosophy sits gathering these golden threads of knowledge, and weaves them into a synthetic whole, wondrous in its complexity and majestic in its totality. And of the master minds who have toiled for her throughout the ages in various lands and climes, he who now sits silent and apart, his life work done, shall be found among the first.

GEORGE H. DERRY.